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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Today, according to the Hebrew calendar, marks the 14th anniversary of the assassination of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. HaQaretz reported that President Obama has videotaped a message to be shown Saturday night at the annual memorial ceremony for Rabin in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv. The message will relate to the murdered

prime minister's legacy and the need to advance the peace process. It was prepared in response to a request from Rabin's daughter, Dalia Rabin. HaQaretz reported that Obama's advisers are worried about his lack of popularity and the expressed feeling that he is hostile to Israel. They believe this seriously harms his ability to advance the peace process with the Palestinians. Obama's advisers see this as the reason why Israelis view his diplomatic initiatives on both Iran and the Palestinians so negatively. HaQaretz reported that recent weeks have seen a number of meetings on the matter in the White House, and that one of the ideas under discussion is an Obama visit to Israel. It was decided at this stage to wait and send Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Jerusalem; she is scheduled to arrive Saturday night.

The media cited objections by Knesset Speaker Reuven (Likud) and other right-wing politicians to aspects of the commemoration of Rabin's assassination, saying that it is too politicized.

Leading media reported that, meeting with PM Benjamin Netanyahu and President Shimon Peres last week, Croatian President Stjepan Mesic offered his government's help in restarting negotiations between Israel and Syria and suggested that his country's Brijuni Islands be used as the site for talks. Netanyahu reportedly asked Mesic about Assad's character and his willingness to reach a peace agreement with Israel and improve ties with the West. Netanyahu said he was ready to relaunch talks with Syria without preconditions, as long as those talks were held directly without a mediator. "I held negotiations with the elder Assad, and I see no reason that I cannot hold negotiations with the younger," Netanyahu reportedly said. Yesterday, several days after the Croatian President returned to Zagreb, Assad paid him a visit. At a press conference, Assad said he would be willing to renew negotiations with Israel and called on Europe to help in such an effort. "We call on European countries to also give their contribution, to help Turkey but also us to be able to resume from where we have stopped," Assad said, adding that the presence of a "third side" would be necessary if the talks resume. "As far as it concerns us in Syria we have national support to continue talks with Israel," Assad said. "However, there is a condition that on the Israeli side we also have those who want to continue the negotiations." (Yediot and other media reported that yesterday Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was actually on a visit to Iran, expressed a message of reconciliation with Israel.) For his part, Mesic said that "the suspended talks should resume and [the] Golan be brought back under Syrian sovereignty Security for Israel should be also guaranteed." Israel Radio quoted President Peres as saying that Israel is willing to make peace with Syria. Leading media quoted DM Ehud Barak as saying that in the past Israel sought, and that it will continue to seek, ways to advance peace with Syria. The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio quoted Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman as saying in testimony before the House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia that the U.S. wants to move beyond dialogue to a more constructive relationship with Syria but that Syria must address U.S. concerns about some of its regional policies, such as its support for terrorist organizations such as Hizbullah and Hamas and its control of foreign fighters trying to enter Iraq.

The Jerusalem Post and other leading media reported that yesterday Hamas announced that it will not allow the PA's Central Elections Committee to start preparations in Gaza for holding new presidential and parliamentary elections on January 24, 2010. The Jerusalem Post says that Hamas's decision to ban the vote in Gaza raises doubts regarding PA President Mahmoud Abbas's ability to hold the elections on time. The Jerusalem Post quoted Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri as saying that the committee was established in violation of "understandings" reached between Hamas and Fatah through Egyptian mediators in recent weeks. He added that according to the ostensible understandings, the committee was supposed to be established in agreement between the two parties.

The Jerusalem Post quoted U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon as saying yesterday he would defer to recommendations by the General Assembly regarding the Goldstone report accusing Israel of war crimes during Operation Cast Lead. Israel Radio quoted Moon as saying that Israel must assist in the reconstruction of Gaza.

The Jerusalem Post noted that one of the most notable political

processes currently taking place in Gaza is the growing prominence of QSalafi jihadQ organizations.

Citing the semi-official Iranian news agency ISNA, The Jerusalem Post quoted Iranian lawmaker Muhammad Karamirad as saying that Tehran would formally respond on Thursday to a UN-drafted plan to ship much of its uranium abroad for enrichment. Leading media reported that yesterday the House Foreign Affairs Committee voted to approve legislation blocking refined petroleum from reaching Tehran.

The Jerusalem Post cited the State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report on Israel released this week that Israel discriminates against non-Orthodox streams of Judaism and against Jewish-born believers in Christianity, while the PA has not been doing enough to combat Muslim violence against Christians. The report states: "Israeli government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion, although government discrimination against non-Jews and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism continued."

Referring to the bloody terrorist attacks in Pakistan, leading media dubbed Secretary ClintonQs visit to that country Qwarm.

Leading media reported that Industry, Trade, and Labor Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer (Labor Party) will be the only government minister attending tonightQs Turkish Republic Day reception at the home of the Turkish Ambassador in Kfar Shmaryahu, a reflection of the current tension between the two countries.

HaQaretz and Israel Radio reported that PM Netanyahu has secretly asked Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi to keep his country in charge of UNIFIL, the U.N. force in Lebanon, rather than handing control to Spain as planned, causing chagrin in Madrid.

Yediot reported that PM Netanyahu is trying to make DM Barak and Justice Minister Yaakov NeQeman agree to a compromise regarding the issue of splitting the functions of the attorney general.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday Supreme Court President Dorit Beinisch accused the Government of ignoring illegal settlement construction in one of several barbed remarks that could presage a first High Court of Justice decision ordering the demolition of illegal housing in the West Bank.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday Channel 2-TV News fired its Palestinian affairs reporter Suleiman al-Shafi over events surrounding a letter by Gilad Shalit that he had obtained while writing a book on the captive soldier.

HaQaretz reported that although there is growing support in the Knesset for a controversial government bill that aims to prevent asylum seekers from entering via the Israeli-Egyptian border, human rights groups charge that this support stems from false information from the IDF. (Two weeks ago, the media quoted IDF units responsible for guarding Israel's expansive western border with Egypt as saying that there are one million would-be infiltrators from Africa waiting to cross the mostly barrier-less border and enter Israel illegally.) The bill, which has passed its first reading, states that anyone who enters Israel without a permit, including refugees, will be subject to immediate expulsion or imprisonment. The human rights organizations say this violates Israel's commitments under the international Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

Yediot reported that two Jewish groups in Switzerland, which represent the majority of the Swiss-Jewish community, are campaigning for the rights of Muslims in the country.

All media reported that yesterday police interrogated Elijah Chumak, a self-styled rabbi who allegedly influenced some of his followers to abuse their children in order to "correct their corrupt souls," after landing at Ben-Gurion Airport following his extradition from Brazil.

Mideast:

Block Quotes:

I. "And the Time Passes, My Friend"

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, opined in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (10/29): QThat which was advocated almost solely by Yitzhak Rabin (with the formidable partnership of Shimon Peres), has become an accepted belief by nearly everyone, including the Likud. Words like QPalestinian state,Q which Rabin hesitated (and never actually uttered) to say publicly are today the recurring refrain sung by Q unbelievably -- Arik Sharon, Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni, and now, please welcome the groom with a loud round of applause, Benjamin Netanyahu. To remind you: this is the very same Netanyahu from the coffin in RaQanana and the balcony of the Zion Hotel in Jerusalem [well-known cases of incitement against Rabin in 1995]. Sharon and Olmert have already said out loud that they had been mistaken. Netanyahu will say the same. We need to be compassionate: it isn't easy to replace a worn out CD that has been playing in your head ever since you were an infant in the cradle. In practice, nearly all of the Zionist parties have adopted the principles that were signed at Oslo, each one using its own terminology. Yitzhak Rabin can rest in peace in his grave. He has successors.

II. "Where to?"

Senior commentator Ari Shavit wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (10/29): Q[Yitzhak] Rabin was great because during his second term as prime minister he realized the existential danger of occupation and decided to take action. The specific action he took -- the Oslo process -- was quite flawed. But the septuagenarian's willingness to foment change and take risks to extricate Israel from its troubles turned Rabin into a historic figure and role model. When Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak give speeches about Rabin at this week's memorial ceremonies, they should ask themselves where they are compared to him.... At a time when Israel faces dramatic challenges, its leadership isn't saying anything or striving for anything. Yes and no, mutters Netanyahu. No and yes, whispers Barak. This isn't how you lead a nation. This isn't how you rebuild a country. If this is the government's price, there isn't any point to it.... Rabin's great insight was that the Jewish democratic state of today cannot choose the status quo. It has two options: getting out of the mud or sinking into it. This is an insight the current government must internalize. The time has come to know where we are going.

III. "The Right, the Obligation, and the Sin"

Liberal columnist Yigal Sarna wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (10/29): QIt should be said in defense of Benjamin NetanyahuQs days in power that there have been no wars during his period. What can be said against him is that [his periods of power] have generally not been times of hope. Hope is an essential ingredient in a nationQs existence. There is no war, but neither is there peace. There is no battle, but thereQs no conciliation. There is a limbo, an abyss -- an empty space that arouses curiosity and a nightmarish feeling about our interim leaderQs internal world. His days are always confused, gloomy, and filled with frictions -- as if he had brought with him a worldview of an inquisitorial world solely populated with persecutors or persecuted people, with no compromise or solution. This is why he fends off wars, letting his successors fight them.

IV. "Some Victims We Are"

Liberal columnist Larry Derfner wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (10/29): QThe truth is that Israel has never been a victim, and our likening of ourselves to the 6 million has been embarrassing from the beginning -- but now? After what we did in Gaza? With the stranglehold we have on that society, while we over here live free and easy? Victims? Lambs to the slaughter? Us? No, this has gone beyond embarrassing; this is out-and-out shameful.... The reason we tell ourselves and the world that we are victims is because we know, whether we admit it to ourselves or not, that victimhood is power. Victimhood is freedom. A victim can't be

told to restrain himself. A victim fighting for survival can't be accused of abusing his power because, after all, his back is to the wall, he's desperate.... Instead, let's take a good, hard look at what we did and what we're doing in Gaza. Then let's take a good, hard look in the mirror. And then let's admit who's the true victim here and now, and, more importantly, who isn't.

IV. QFar from Watertight

The Jerusalem Post editorialized (10/29): QIsrael is under fire again for supposed human rights contraventions. Hot on the heels of the Goldstone Report, which is at the behest of the U.N. Human Rights Council charged Israel with war crimes against Gazan civilians in Operation Cast Lead, Amnesty International this week accuses Israel of depriving the Palestinians of the most basic and vital of all commodities -- water.... So-called human rights organizations have become the prime weapon of choice with which to whack Israel. In the name of ostensible liberality, Israel is repeatedly placed in the dock of world opinion, where it is tarnished as the villain among nations. There's almost no sphere where Israel can remotely expect a fair shake.... While ostensibly pursuing a well-intentioned attempt to improve Palestinian welfare, Amnesty seems more intent on coming up with pretexts to justify its assertion that Israel Qdenies hundreds of thousands of Palestinians the right to live a normal life, to have adequate food, housing or health, and to economic development.Q A readiness to first hear, and then take into account, the Israeli side of the vexed water dispute would have enabled a more credible report -- and one more likely to have practical impact.

CUNNINGHAM